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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

Wednesday, November 15, 1944

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Subject: "Home-made Christmas Toys." Information from Extension Service
A U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Now that it's November---Christmas will be here sooner than you think! Soon enough, anyway, to start thinking now about packing Santa's sack. All of which leads up to this suggestion about cutting down on the wear and tear of the annual union derby. Or--if you prefer--the Christmas shopping rush. The suggestion in question? Well--it's this. Why not try your own hand at a little home-made handiwork? Cut loose with that creative urge and give the tiny tots a break---instead of SOMETHING TO BREAK which is too often the result of a trip to town.

Yes--take it right straight from extension specialists of the Department of Agriculture, the shortage of mechanical gadgets is by way of being a boon to the small fry. Now, proud parents, who have been taking over the kiddies' trains and mechanical trucks as soon as they come off the tree, will doubtless have a damper put on such antics. But don't think the kiddies care about the shortage of those gadgets---because they don't! Well--if you want proof--just take a peep into the playroom to size up the situation. Here's a penny that says the trains and tracks and gadgets that wind up with spring will most certainly be stacked away in a forgotten heap. And--it will be the simple blocks and boxes and stick horses that will be ready at hand.

The point I'm gradually getting around to is that small fry are sometimes smarter than adults when it comes to knowing what's good for them. Children like toys that satisfy their urge for action--action on their own part, I mean. And they won't get that by sitting around watching a small train or truck go whizzing by. And that same sitting around won't help develop muscular coordination or

growth either. But--toys that call for pushing, pulling, throwing, running, and jumping---will. As for mental growth--that's stimulated by simple puzzles, picture books, building blocks, and spool boards. AND--just watch the kiddies at play and you'll find these are the kind of toys that are tops with them. And these are also the kind of toys that can be made in only a few minutes. As for the materials--they're usually at hand in any home. Have your fun now--so the kiddies can have theirs--come Christmas. And don't say it isn't fun to make toys until you give it a try.

For example---get an old sock and a broom handle and try your skill at fabricating a stick horse. Just lop off a three-foot piece of the broomstick--stuff the sock with cotton or excelsior and fit it over the end of the stick. The broomstick should be pushed well up through the cotton or excelsior, of course, and the sock opening tacked to the stick. After that you can proceed to suit your own fancy. If you prefer, you can outline the mouth and face with colored yarn add buttons for eyes. And of course, stuffed fingers of worn-out gloves can be sewed on for ears. As for the bridle and harness you can use strips of leather, an old belt, or a double fold of denim.

Or perhaps you'd rather make a wagon. For that you'll need a small wooden box--such as a cheese box--and either spools--or rounds cut from a broom handle for wheels. You can apply a bit of lacquer as a finishing touch.

Or you can make a toy truck from a cigar box and a cocoa can. The cigar box, of course, is used for the truck bed and the cocoa can for the engine hood. Wheels can be concocted from any number of objects. Small jar covers--narrow pieces of dowling--spools--or rounds from broom handles all make satisfactory wheels.

As a matter of fact, a wide variety of toys can be made from an assortment of spools, small wooden boxes and odds and ends of boards. There are cheese-box trains linked together with cup hooks and screw eyes, carts made of soap boxes mounted on wheels, and building blocks made of cheese boxes. The hollow building

blocks are made by nailing down the top and painting all sides with bright colored lacquer.

If perchance--young Sam or Sally has an artistic bent--one way to provide an outlet is modeling clay. Home-made modeling clay can be concocted with the following formula; One cup of flour, one half cup of salt, three teaspoons of alum, and vegetable coloring. To make the clay, mix the flour, salt, and alum with enough water to hold them together. Knead until you have the consistency of clay, then divide into small batches and add the vegetable coloring. Mold each separate color into an oblong block--wrap in clear oiled paper or cellophane and pack neatly into a box. You'll have to look far to find a more attractive Christmas package. Incidentally--a little water kneaded into the home-made clay when the surface dries out will keep it in good modeling condition.

Another solid favorite for Santa's satchel is a picture book made from old magazines and swatches of colored cloth.

Well--those are a few suggestions. The important thing to remember, is that tops in toys for tiny tots include small wagons or animals to push or pull; a doll or soft animal to cuddle; a box of good-sized blocks to build into houses or trains; some bright pegs to push into holes in a board; a scrapbook to look at; or a cut-out puzzle to put together.

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